DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 385 806 CG 026 392

TITLE	A Portrait of a Generation: 25 Years of Teen Behavior and Attitudes.
INSTITUTION	Who's Who among American High School Students, Lake Forest, IL.
PUB DATE	[95]
NOTE	23p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Cheating; Drug Use; *High Achievement; *High School Students; Late Adolescents; Sexual Abuse; Sexuality; *Student Attitudes; *Student Surveys; Suicide; Violence
IDENTIFIERS	*Annual Survey of High Achievers; Whos Who Among American High School Students

ABSTRACT

The annual Survey of High Achievers conducted by Who's Who Among American High School Students is the nation's largest, most comprehensive independent sampling of high school students' opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. All the high-achieving 16-18 year old students surveyed have "A" or "B" averages, and 98 percent plan to attend college after high school. During the last 25 years of surveying young people, society has undergone a transformation. The culture has lurched from "The Brady Bunch" to "Beavis and Butthead"; from John Dean to Jeffrey Dahmer; from worries about acne to terror about AIDS. This survey assesses student opinions and experiences in the following topics: (1) school violence; (2) date rape and sexual assault; (3) suicide; (4) drinking and driving; (5) drug use; (6) smoking; (7) cheating; (8) sex; (9) contraceptive use; (10) confidence in government institutions; (11) confidence in the media; and (12) family situations. Results are presented in 48 figures throughout the text. (SR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 385 806

CG

A Portrait of A Generation: 25 Years of Teen Behavior and Attitudes

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. CASEY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- ☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CG026392

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3

PART I: EXTERNAL FORCES TAKE A TOLL 5

- SCHOOL VIOLENCE -- GANGS AND WEAPONS 6
- DATE RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT 7
- SUICIDE 7

PART II: RISKY BEHAVIORS -- THOSE TEENAGE YEARS 8

- DRINKING 8
- DRINKING AND DRIVING 9
- DRUG USE 9
- SMOKING 12
- CHEATING 12
- SEX 12
- CONTRACEPTIVE USE 13

PART III: THE INSTITUTIONS THAT SUPPORT US 14

- CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESIDENT, CONGRESS, SUPREME COURT, AND POLICE 14
- CONFIDENCE IN THE MEDIA 15

PART IV: RETURN TO A SAFE INSTITUTION -- THE FAMILY 16

CONCLUSION 18

DATA INDEX 19

The *Annual Survey of High Achievers* conducted by *Who's Who Among American High School Students* is the nation's largest, most comprehensive independent sampling of high school students' opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. All the high-achieving 16- to 18-year old students surveyed have "A" or "B" averages, and 98 percent plan to attend college after high school. Beginning in 1970 and conducted yearly through 1994, the *Annual Survey of High Achievers* has tracked trends in teen behavior and attitudes on subjects including school life, sexual activity, social issues, study habits, drug and alcohol use, and teen suicide. This report examines those trends and draws conclusions from 25 years of valuable data, demonstrating the relationship between student behavior and the outside world.

INTRODUCTION

Of all the peculiar creatures on earth, human teenagers may be the most unfathomable. What parent isn't baffled when a cheerful, obedient son or daughter transforms overnight into a surly wall of defiance? What adult can explain an adolescent's sudden, irresistible urge to experiment with life-altering -- or life-ending -- activities?

Try asking teens why they do what they do, and you're lucky to get much more than a shrug. Parents and other perplexed adults are left to draw their own conclusions about what "these kids today" are made of.

With so little to go on, it's no surprise that stereotypes arise. Conventional wisdom portrays teens as either an overindulged, shallow, and self-centered group -- the prototypes for Generation X -- or as an unfortunate bunch who have been robbed of the best years of their lives. According to either interpretation, there are troubling signs that the future is being passed into less steady hands.

Fortunately, we have more reliable information than hunches to help us demystify the teen years. For a quarter of a century, *Who's Who Among American High School Students* has been examining this puzzling population by going straight to the source -- high school students. Since 1970, *Who's Who* has conducted the nation's largest, most comprehensive independent survey of high-achieving high school students' opinions. With the truth as told by teens themselves, we can enlighten what society accepts too easily as "facts" about adolescents. By listening to young people's voices, we have been able to tune in to the changing cadences that have guided their steps for almost a generation.

What we have found is that both stereotypes of teens contain grains of truth, but neither tells the whole story. Today's young people are indeed different from those 25 years ago -- more fortunate in some ways and sorely more deprived in others. They will live longer, will never have to suffer through the measles, and they enjoy far more material goods, equipped with everything from cable to computers to call waiting. On the other hand, coming of age in the nineties has its drawbacks: carjackings, drive-by shootings, and soaring college tuition among them. Teens these days are understandably weighed down by all that's grown worse in the world, and that shows up clearly in the *Who's Who* surveys. The surprise is that they are also stubbornly making the best of it.

TEEN TRENDS 1970-1994

↓	ALCOHOL EXPERIMENTATION
↔	REGULAR ALCOHOL USE
↓	MARIJUANA USE
↔	SEX
↑	CONTRACEPTIVE USE
↑	SUICIDE
↑	DANGER AT SCHOOL
↑	GANGS AT SCHOOL
↑	DRUNK DRIVING
↓	SMOKING
↑	CHEATING
↑	DIVORCE OF PARENTS
↑	HAPPINESS AT HOME
↓	CONFIDENCE IN MEDIA
↓	CONFIDENCE IN LOCAL POLICE
↓	CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESIDENT

On one hand, the data show us a generation that has grown increasingly cynical -- with fading faith in an array of society's institutions from the president to the local police. They are more willing to cheat. They are increasingly victims of or witnesses to violence and, consequently, more fearful for their physical safety -- even at school. Confidence in the media, in the president, in Congress and the Supreme Court, and even in local law enforcement has dropped to very low levels. And suicide rates are up. While teens have never stopped tempting fate by drinking and driving, they have over the years become more responsible and more mature about taking charge of their lives: fewer teens drink, smoke, or use marijuana, and more of sexually-active teens use contraceptives these days. And throughout an era that has buffeted and battered the family, the young people surveyed have clung fast to the rails of the mother ship. Parents are one institution in which teens have maintained great confidence, and the family is the place they turn for security and guidance.

Why have teens changed so much over the years, and why has their need for their families remained so steady? We have to look no further than our own neighborhoods for an interpretation. In the houses next door and in the streets, we've watched a steady erosion of the institutions and individuals who traditionally protected youngsters from the harshest realities of life. Families have fragmented, schools have become overburdened, and neither police nor public officials have been able to keep crime at bay. Without adults to insulate them, teens now absorb an unvarnished version of the worst of times through the media and through direct observation. They can no longer rely on adults to shield them from bad news or even to put great news in a proper perspective. If young people can't find what they need at home or within themselves, they have few other places to turn.

The result: ***As childhood's layers of insulation have worn thinner, these adolescents have grown to look less and less like youngsters and more and more like the adults they have yet to become.***

For better and worse, teens' lives have been shaped by the world adults have created for them. We have saddled our children with adult burdens, without giving them the guidance to use their new responsibilities wisely or well. We ask them to make grown-up decisions, but have failed to give them the tools they need to avoid making risky ones. Having witnessed the collapse of the institutions and many of the myths that used to cushion young people from the full weight of the world, adults are now faced with a decision. We can either erect new structures and buttress existing ones to support and nurture teens, or we can leave the next generation on its own to make the best of a bad situation. Down the first road lies a rededication on the part of parents to build up the elements of society that can help teens grow into responsible adults -- community organizations, youth groups, schools, mentors, employers, churches, and above all, the relationship with their own families. Down the other road: a continued slide into the kind of cynicism that kills dreams.

The one road that is closed is the path back to some fifties-vintage ideal, where all families stay together, parents have unlimited time with their children, and the streets are safe even after dark. Teaching teens how to make the best of a more realistic version of the world is a critical part of helping them learn the facts of life.

PART I: EXTERNAL FORCES TAKE A TOLL

During the last 25 years of surveying young people, society has undergone a transformation. Our culture has lurched from The Brady Bunch to Beavis and Butthead; from John Dean to Jeffrey Dahmer; from worries about acne to terror about AIDS. The teens who answered the first *Who's Who* surveys in the 70s were shaped not only by the lingering, pot-scented aura of the 60s, but also by the hard-edged reality of an economic decline, the Jonestown massacre, a president's disgrace, the energy crisis, the birth of a test-tube baby, and the death of Elvis.

Their 80s successors, raised by a generation that discovered you can't live on love, began to form their world view through a cloud of Challenger smoke, Mount St. Helen's ash, and a hail of assassins' bullets aimed at John Lennon and President Reagan. They watched medical waste wash up on the New Jersey shore, and they wondered why shining stars like John Belushi and Len Bias lost their lives trying to burn even brighter.

The 90s generation has been molded by Rodney King and the L.A. riots, a deep recession, a war in Iraq, the collapse of the Soviet Union, natural disasters of apocalyptic proportions -- fires, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes -- and unnatural acts like the Oklahoma City bombing. Magic Johnson's HIV infection and the arrest of O.J. Simpson remind them that having it all doesn't necessarily guarantee happiness.

Since the first teens answered the first *Who's Who* survey, mothers of young children have flocked to the workforce in unprecedented numbers, divorce has become an everyday occurrence, and even some priests have been revealed as pedophiles. All this has occurred against a backdrop of rampant gunfire, a drug epidemic, a rash of celebrity suicides, and unprecedented chicanery among the public figures these adolescents are supposed to respect. It's therefore not surprising that our teenagers are reacting to the violence and examples around them.

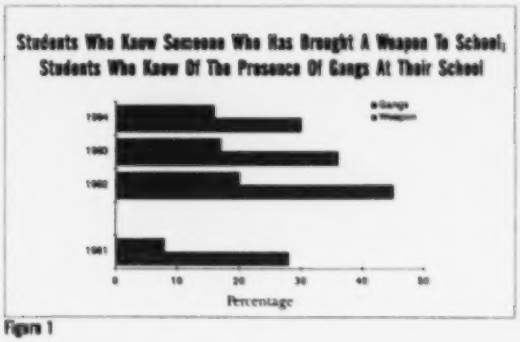


Figure 1

SCHOOL VIOLENCE -- GANGS AND WEAPONS

Perhaps nothing better explains why the young at heart have grown so down in the mouth than the savage violence that surrounds them. Gangs. Weapons at school. Date rape. Sexual assault. What we looked for, no matter how horrifying, we seemed to find.

Parents used to send children off to school secure in the knowledge that, even if they weren't becoming academic superstars, at least they were safe and sheltered. Over 25 years, that sense of safety has been shaken. We have asked teens periodically since 1981 about weapons at their high schools. That first year, 28% said they knew of the presence of weapons at school; in the last few years, that number rose to 45% (1992) and then fell back to 36% in 1993 and 30% in 1994. The recent decline may be a payoff from schools' investment in security measures. As weapons became alarmingly common, schools instituted locker checks, anonymous "tip lines," and metal detectors to discover and deter their presence.

As schools themselves became battlefields, even the noncombatants learned to guard their flanks. Teens today know from personal observation just how vulnerable they are, not just on the streets but in the confines of the classroom.

In 1975, 7% of teens described their schools as dangerous. While it's shocking that even 7% felt unsafe in their own high schools, at least the number stayed in single digits throughout the 1970s. When asked again in 1993, 12% admitted that they have felt unsafe at school -- a 71% increase -- and 11% felt the same way in 1994.

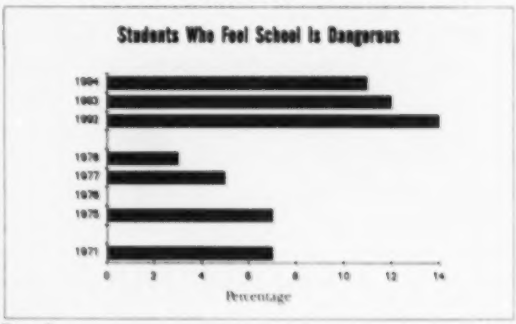
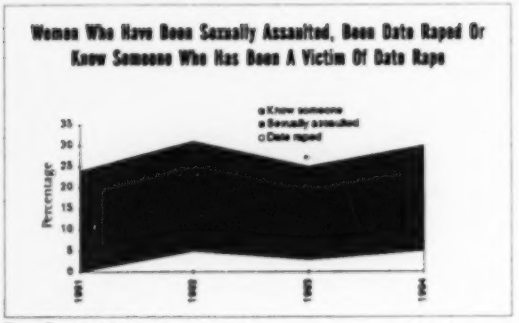


Figure 2

Twenty-five years ago, the closest these teens came to gang activity was Bonnie and Clyde -- the movie. By 1981, asking about gangs in schools was an obvious question. The number who point to the presence of gangs in their schools doubled from 8% to 16% from 1981 to 1994. For the last 14 years, a growing number of students -- in the suburbs, in the cities, in private as well as public schools -- have felt the threat of gang activity in their schools.

Note: Gaps in data indicate question was not asked that year.

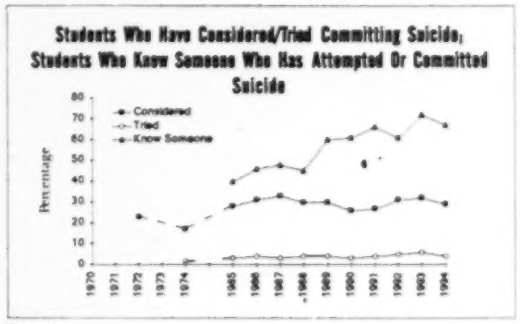
DATE RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT


Women Who Have Been Sexually Assaulted, Been Date Raped Or Know Someone Who Has Been A Victim Of Date Rape
Know someone
Sexually assaulted
Date raped
Percentage
Figure 3

In the 90s, these teens were asked about date rape as the magnitude of the problem surfaced. Since 1992, close to a quarter of teens surveyed have consistently said they knew someone who has been date raped, and the data fluctuated between 3% and 5% of young women who say they themselves have been raped by a date. The numbers are three to four times as large -- and increasing -- when the question is about "sexual assault" -- an unwanted sexual attack or forced sexual contact: from 11% in 1992 up to 19% in 1994 say they have been sexually assaulted in some manner, the overwhelming number by someone the victims knew.

SUICIDE

Sadly, many teens are surrendering the fight. Every year, at least 17% of *Who's Who* teens -- the brightest youths with the brightest futures -- struggle with the urge to commit suicide. One of the darkest years in the survey was 1993, when a high of 32% had considered suicide, 72% knew a young person who had attempted or committed suicide, and 6% had tried it themselves. In 25 years, no less than 2% in any one survey had tried to take his or her own life. These numbers have fluctuated but show an overall increase in 25 years despite growing awareness of the problem and efforts to identify and thwart suicidal tendencies. In the latest survey, 29% had considered suicide, 4% had made a suicide attempt, and 67% knew someone their age who had attempted or committed suicide. When young people look for adult role models to guide them through their hopeless times, too often they only find confirmation that giving up is the way out.


Students Who Have Considered/Tried Committing Suicide; Students Who Know Someone Who Has Attempted Or Committed Suicide
Considered
Tried
Know Someone
Percentage
Figure 4

Every decade has had its display of celebrity self-destructiveness to further shake young people's confidence that life is worth living: Freddie Prinze's suicide in the 70s; Karen Carpenter's death from anorexia and John Belushi's drug overdose in the 80s; and Kurt Cobain's suicide in 1994 are some prominent examples. In the best of all worlds, being a teenager is an uphill emotional battle. With so many dark forces to cope with today, teens need more help than ever from adults -- just at a time when that help is at its scarcest.

With first-hand knowledge of the world's dangers, it's small wonder that the teens we hear from seem not just worldly-wise but also a bit world-weary. And it's also no surprise that teens today have a growing sense of alarm about the fragile state of their own well-being.

PART II: RISKY BEHAVIORS -- THOSE TEENAGE YEARS

While a sense of safety may have been a casualty of the passing decades, not every vestige of childhood has disappeared in a hail of gunfire. Teens still indulge themselves in bouts of daredevilry that in kinder times would be typical indicators of lingering immaturity. Being forced to grow up fast, though, does have a few advantages. In some ways, teens have been fortified by adversity and have decided to take matters into their own hands. Acting more responsibly about certain aspects of their physical health is one prominent example.

DRINKING

Drinking remains a popular form of entertainment, although much less prevalent in 1994 than it was for most of the quarter century we examined: experimental drinking fell from a high of 74% in 1972 down to 51% in 1994. While that's encouraging news, alcohol remains a potent lure among the very young -- despite the fact that it's been put legally out of reach for anyone under 21 since the survey began. Regular use of alcohol has stayed nearly the same over 25 years, starting at 16% who drank beer regularly in 1971 and ending the quarter century in 1994 with 19% who drink alcoholic beverages regularly -- at least monthly.

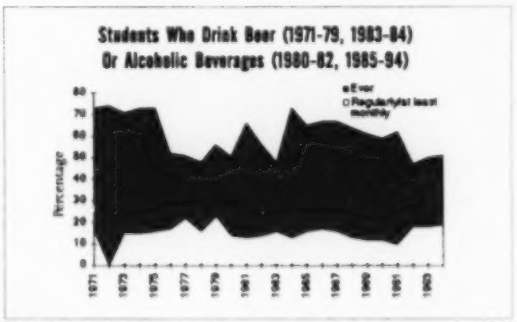


Figure 5

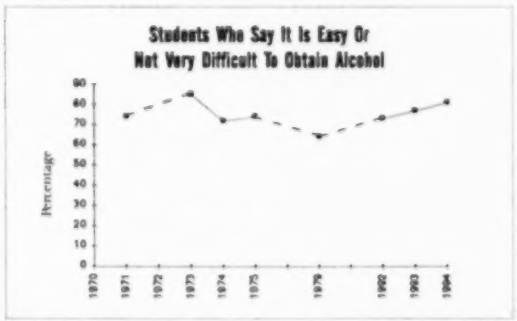


Figure 6

The law has failed to deter teens, who have consistently said over the years that obtaining alcohol is easy. While the question wording has varied, that message comes across loud and clear. In 1971, 74% of teens said that "underage drinkers could purchase alcohol in their community"; in 1979, 64% said they could "readily purchase alcohol," and in 1994, 81% said "it is easy or not very difficult for me and my friends to get alcohol."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

With fewer teens using alcohol, it begins to look as if the efforts society has made to urge them to behave more responsibly are having an effect. But teens' confidence that they can obtain alcohol whenever they want it tells adults we need to do far more than post "No Alcohol Sales to Minors" warnings if we want to keep our young people sober.

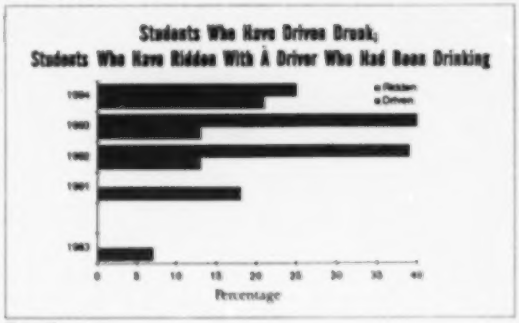


Figure 7

DRINKING AND DRIVING

In 1983, 7% said they had driven drunk. Nine years later, that number had almost doubled, to 13%, and another 39% admitted to getting in a car with a driver who had been drinking. In 1994, one in four students -- 25% -- had been passengers in cars whose drivers had too much to drink, and 21% had driven after drinking themselves. Perhaps it's because today's teens find themselves cowering inwardly that they feel compelled to defy their demons in some reckless ways. Despite a decade-long campaign aimed at driving drunks off the road, these teens continue to put themselves behind the wheel after drinking or ride with a driver who's had a few too many.

Recent research suggests that teens are at least to some extent simply doing as their parents do: the data show a strong correlation between teens who say their parents drink and those who drink themselves -- in 1994, 66% of students who drink at least monthly say their parents are heavy or moderate drinkers, compared with 34% of these students who say their parents are abstainers. There also appears to be a correlation between teens who say their parents drive after drinking and those who decide to mix drinking and driving themselves -- in 1994, 27% of students with parents who have ever driven after drinking did so themselves, compared to 19% of students with parents who were not suspected of drunk driving by their son or daughter. With fewer adults around who look worthy of imitation, perhaps teens grab for the closest approximation of "adult" behavior they can identify with and emulate. It's hard to imagine that drinking and driving could look glamorous or grown-up to these teens, but it continues to be one of the chances a stubborn minority of them choose to take.

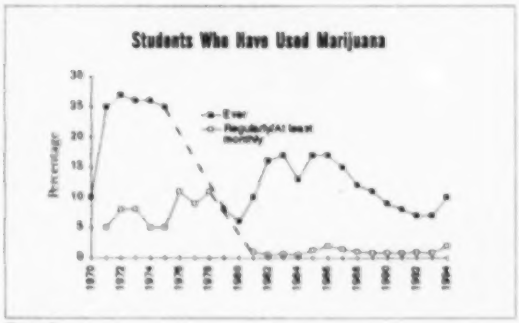


Figure 8

DRUG USE

Teens have definitely learned their lessons about drugs. Getting high is at an all-time low among today's high school students. The percentage of teens who have ever used marijuana has dropped by almost two-thirds since it peaked at 27% in 1972. In the last survey, 10% said they had tried marijuana. Similarly, regular use of marijuana has dropped from 5% in 1971 to 2% in 1994, reaching an all-time high at 11% in 1976 and 1978. Approval of marijuana smoking has fallen to one-third its

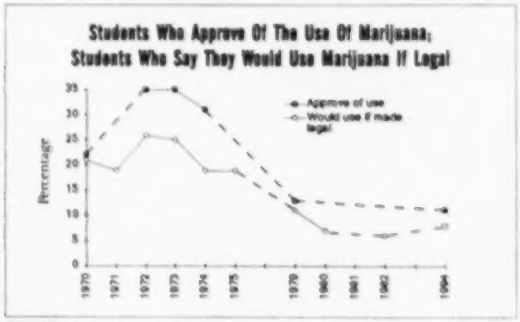


Figure 9

REMEMBER WHEN . . . ?

1970

The Beatles split up

Jimi Hendrix dies of drug-related causes

1971

Walt Disney World opens in Florida

Supreme Court backed busing to end segregation in public schools

1972

Seven men indicted in Watergate break-in

1973

US agrees to stop fighting in Vietnam, troops withdrawn

Willie Mays announces retirement from baseball

1977

Energy crisis

Elvis Presley dies at age 42

1978

Cult leader Jim Jones leads 909 people to mass suicide in Guyana

Families leave Love Canal after dangerous chemical leakage

1979

Serious nuclear accident at Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania

Peace accord announced at Camp David between Israel and Egypt

1983

Sally Ride becomes first woman in space

Martin Luther King's birthday becomes national holiday

1984

First mandatory seat belt law instituted in New York

Michael Jackson's "Thriller" album breaks records, sells 37 million

1985

French and American scientists discover SS Titanic

Pete Rose breaks Ty Cobb's record for number of hits with hit number 4,192

1989

Northern California destroyed by 7.1 earthquake

Chinese students protest in Tiananmen Square

Berlin wall falls

1990

Saddam Hussein leads Iraq to invade Kuwait

1991

US sends troops to Kuwait for Operation Desert Storm

1974

Baryshnikov, Soviet ballet star, defects to the US

Nixon resigns to avoid impeachment, Ford pardons Nixon

1975

Margaret Thatcher elected as Britain's first female leader

Supreme Court okays spanking of pupils

1976

Women enter Air Force Academy for first time

US Bicentennial celebration

1980

US boycotts Olympics in Moscow

Mount St. Helens erupts

1981

Iran releases 52 American hostages after 444 days

Assassination attempt on President Reagan by John Hinckley, Jr.

1982

John Belushi dies of drug overdose

Barney Clark is first recipient of artificial heart

1986

US space shuttle Challenger explodes shortly after lift-off

Nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl, Ukraine

1987

Dow Jones Industrial Average falls 508 points on Black Monday

Van Gogh's "Irises" sells for record $53.6 million at auction

1988

Earthquake in Armenia kills 80,000

1992

Riots in Los Angeles in response to Rodney King beating

1993

Midwest ravaged by floods from Mississippi River

Olympic figure skater Nancy Kerrigan attacked during practice, fellow skater Tonya Harding later implicated

1994

Grunge rocker Kurt Cobain of Nirvana commits suicide

Nelson Mandela elected President in historic democratic elections in South Africa

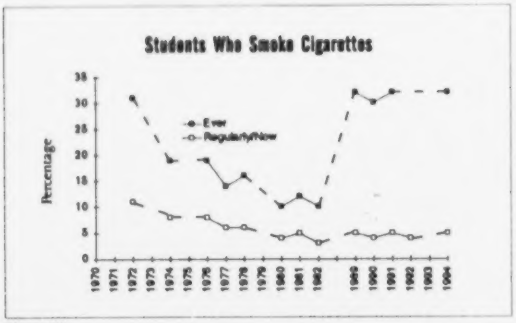


Figure 10

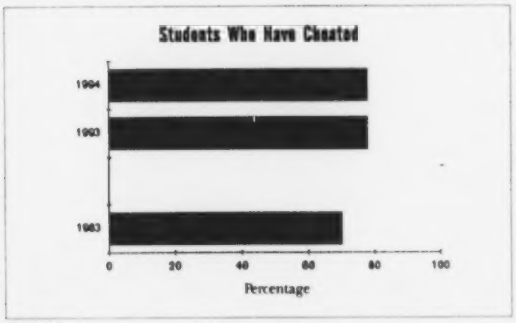


Figure 11

highest levels: from 35% in 1972 and 1973, down to 11% in 1994. And now, only 8% say they would use marijuana even if it were made legal, whereas up to a quarter of teens said they would in the early seventies.

SMOKING

Another encouraging sign: Joe Camel will have to walk many miles to persuade these youngsters that smoking is cool. Cigarettes have definitely lost their appeal among *Who's Who* teens: while experimentation with smoking has returned to a high level, only 5% now smoke, down from 1972, when 11% smoked.

CHEATING

Another arena in which teens have chosen to test their luck is by cheating on their schoolwork, a surprising lapse from the nation's brightest youngsters. We first asked whether these teens ever strayed from the straight and narrow academic path in 1983 and found a mind-boggling 70% who admitted to having cheated at some time. That number has increased to 78% in both 1993 and 1994. By probing for an explanation in the latest survey, 1994, we found that to 66% of teens, cheating "didn't seem like a big deal." Easy to see how taking the easy way out on some homework may not feel like a major menace when your classmates are packing heat. It also makes sense that young people today are simply emulating the adult behavior they see all around them. With everyone from presidents to priests getting caught breaking the rules, teens may think that taking the low road is a sign of maturity.

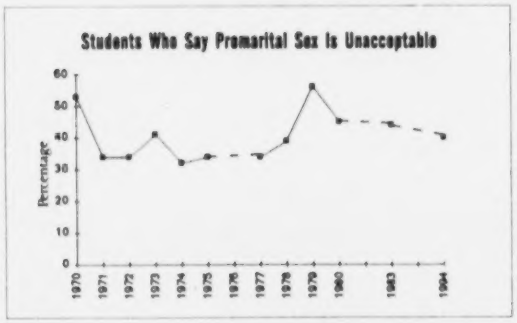
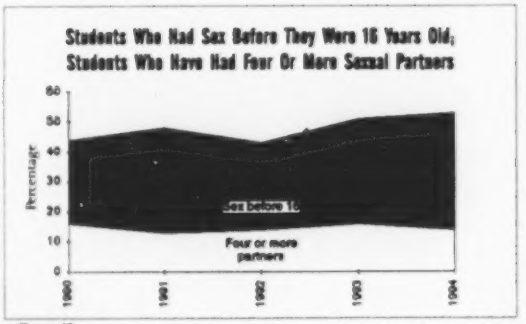


Figure 12

SEX

When it comes to sexual activity, far more of these young people "Just Say No" than "Just Do It." About three-quarters have clung to their virginity throughout two and a half decades of a sex-saturated society. The number of teens who say they have had sex has stayed fairly steady over time (approximately a quarter), although the number who disapprove of premarital sex has risen and fallen. Fifty-three percent believed premarital sex was unacceptable in 1970, about 35% felt that way through most of the seventies, 45% disapproved in 1980, and 40% did in the latest survey. Those who are having sex have been doing so at younger ages: the percentage of sexually-active teens who had their first sexual experience before they were sixteen years old has risen from 44% in 1990, the first year we asked, to 53% in 1994. The number who have had multiple sexual partners -- four or more -- in their young lives has held steadily in the 13-16% range in the last five years. The teens surveyed by *Who's Who* have neither flung themselves into the sexual revolution still raging in the seventies, nor have they swung wildly to the abstinence side of the aisle in the post-AIDS era.

CONTRACEPTIVE USE


Students Who Had Sex Before They Were 15 Years Old;
Students Who Have Had Four Or More Sexual Partners
Percentage
Four or more partners
Figure 13

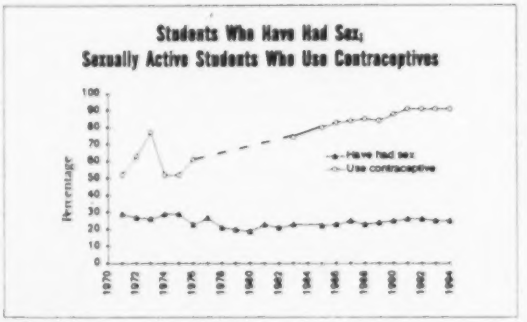


Figure 14

The good news is that, even though there's far to go, more sexually-active teens are now using contraceptives of all kinds -- including condoms. Whether inspired by fear, easier availability, or just a more mature outlook, teens who are having sex are now using contraceptives at a vastly greater rate, and far more consistently than ever before. From a hazardously low 52% in the 1970s to a responsible 91% in 1994, the decision to be safe while having sex is one of the bright spots that has appeared over the years. True, it looks like it took an epidemic to bring about the change: the numbers hit 80% for the first time in 1985, by which time knowledge of AIDS as a public health menace had become widespread, and they have been climbing ever since. Condoms are the best protection sexually active teens have against AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. However, sexually active teens have far to go before they're completely safe, as their only occasional use of condoms attests.

Their reckless refusal to use condoms in particular each and every time they have sex is another sure sign that teens today are unprepared to accept the responsibilities of the adult role they have been catapulted into. In 1994, 35% of sexually active teens said they would have sex even if a condom weren't available, and in the previous year, more than half of the sexually active males and 42% of all teens answered the same way.

With AIDS one of several threats appearing in the last quarter century, it's frightening to think that the safe sex message has yet to make an impression on more than a third of these teenagers. Despite countless campaigns to persuade every person of the dangers of unprotected sex, teens continue to be cavalier about their own vulnerability. If condom use continues to climb like general contraceptive use has, perhaps someday teenagers will be as invulnerable to disease as they often fancy themselves.

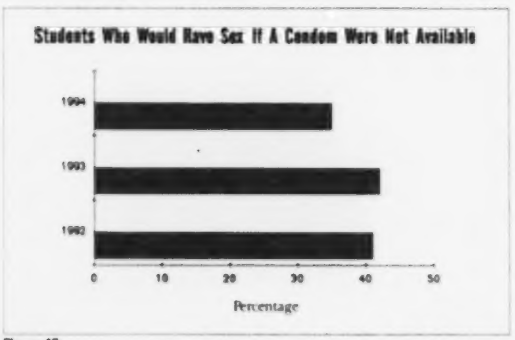


Figure 15

Short-term pleasures that risk long-term consequences will probably always be a magnet for adventuresome teenagers. With threats to life and limb everywhere today, parents must be especially vigilant about setting a good example for youth. Parents must teach teens what being a grown-up really means, and offer them alternatives to taking life-threatening, or health-threatening, risks.

PART III: THE INSTITUTIONS THAT SUPPORT US

Of all the factors that comprise the sweetness of youth, idealism has taken the biggest beating at the hands of time among *Who's Who* teens. Twenty-five years of malfeasance and mediocrity at society's highest levels have worn down young people's confidence in institutions to a new low point. With each passing year, even these high-achieving youngsters, who have so much to look forward to, have grown more hard-pressed to find any adults outside their own families to look up to. The depth and breadth of their cynicism belie their tender years.

CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESIDENT, CONGRESS, SUPREME COURT, AND POLICE

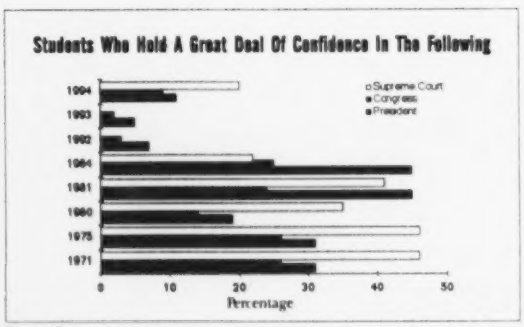


Figure 16

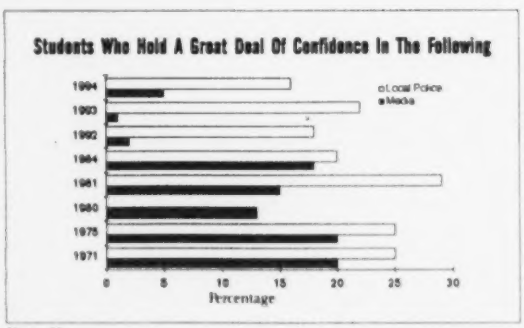


Figure 17

With scandals plaguing the White House, from Watergate to Whitewater, confidence in the president has evaporated from the dimensions of a small pool down to a tiny puddle. After a weak start in the Nixon and Ford eras, and a low peak during the Reagan years, faith in the Commander in Chief has now bottomed out. The percentage of teens who say they have a "great deal" of confidence in the president started at 31% in 1971 -- a number that held into 1975 -- then climbed to 45% in 1981 and 1984, and has now fallen to 7%, 5%, and 11% in Bill Clinton's 90s -- a 65% decline from 1971 to 1994.

The House and Senate have suffered a similar fate. Through the seventies and eighties, Congress clung to about a quarter of teens who said they had confidence in both legislative houses. In the 90s, that faith has fallen from 25% to single digits -- 9% for Congress in 1994. By then, a House bank scandal and sexual harassment allegations had sunk the ship of state, which no doubt took a few youthful illusions down with it.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Held in only slightly higher esteem is the highest court in the land. Twenty percent of *Who's Who* teens still have a great deal of confidence in the Supreme Court, but that's less than half the number who did in the survey's early days -- 46% in both 1971 and 1975.

And you don't have to reside in Washington, D.C. to warrant disdain from this jaded bunch. The latest batch of teens give their local police a lower rating than any of their predecessors did: a mere 16% in the latest survey had a great deal of confidence in local law enforcement, down from a high of 29% in 1981 and from 25% in 1971. As young people have observed over the years that they can no longer count on police to keep them safe from the wars raging in the streets, their trust in peace officers has faded away.

CONFIDENCE IN THE MEDIA

When it comes to trust, the greatest familiarity seems to have bred the greatest contempt. Only 5% of teens in 1994 said they had a great deal of confidence in the media, a steady downward slide from a 20% high in 1971. A TV diet rich in Geraldo clones has done little to make the television generation fall in love with the medium. In fact, the fourth estate has consistently come in dead last among the institutions asked about since the beginning of the *Who's Who* survey, a lowly rank that has dwindled almost to the point of disappearance.

Teens are following their elders' lead in making television the culprit as the purveyor and instigator of violence, and they have pronounced judgment on all the media as biased and untrustworthy. While less than a third (30%) believed the media were biased in 1971, now more than half do (51%). And a majority, 59%, think television displays too much violence, up slightly from 57% in 1977. In light of the low regard teens have developed for the media, perhaps it's not surprising that the First Amendment has taken a pounding along the way. Most teens these days -- 50% in 1994 versus 36% in 1974 -- would readily censor television and/or movies, another sign that they lack faith in institutions to work things out -- even if those institutions are as old and venerated as the Constitution.

Even if public figures are not involved in something scandalous, they likely seem to have become less and less effective to young people. Tomorrow's leaders can't help but notice that today's leaders, those who are supposed to be showing them the way, have manifestly failed to make the world a better place.

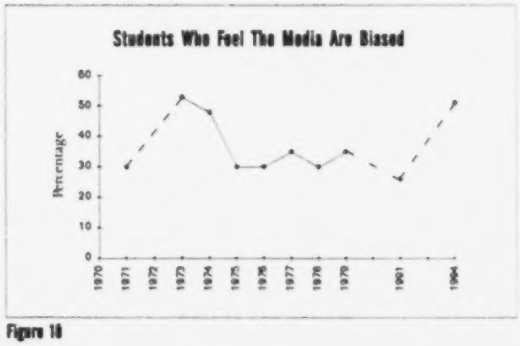


Figure 18

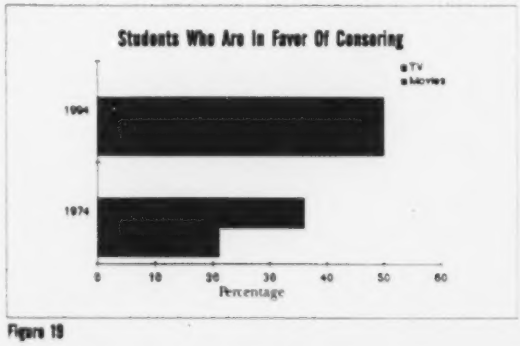


Figure 19

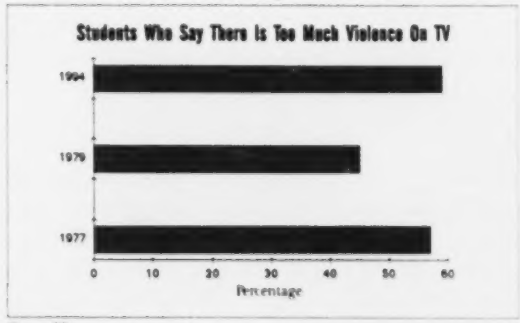


Figure 20

PART IV: RETURN TO A SAFE INSTITUTION -- THE FAMILY

The one shining exception to teens' cynical approach to adults is the extent to which teenagers care about their families. Ann Landers has been saying it for years, but it never hurts to hear it from teens themselves: no matter how hard they may be fighting to separate themselves from the grasp.of the family, teenagers believe parents matter, a happy home life matters, and they crave and respect their parents' guidance.

This hasn't changed despite a soaring divorce rate, the gradual disappearance of the two-parent household, mothers joining the workforce, or the increasing dangers that lie beyond the doorstep. In fact, although divorce rates have doubled among these teens' parents, from a low 8% in 1971 to a still-low 17% in 1994, more teens now say they feel they have a happy home life -- from 59% in 1971 up to 68% in 1994.

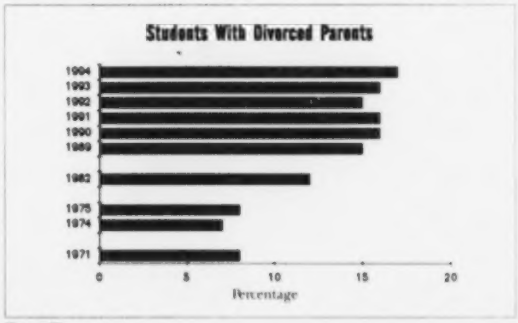


Figure 21

While society has been lamenting the lack of heroes, we've been overlooking an ample supply right under our own noses. Today's teens -- the same cynical, shortsighted crew that is underawed by the highest elected officials -- have to look no further than their own living rooms for the people they most admire -- their folks. Over the years, we've probed these sentiments in several different ways: in 1982, mothers came out on top as "the person with the greatest influence" on teens' lives with 48%, and fathers came in second with 16%; in 1994, a massive 81% said they had a "great deal of confidence" in their parents, the only institution to command anywhere near that level of respect.

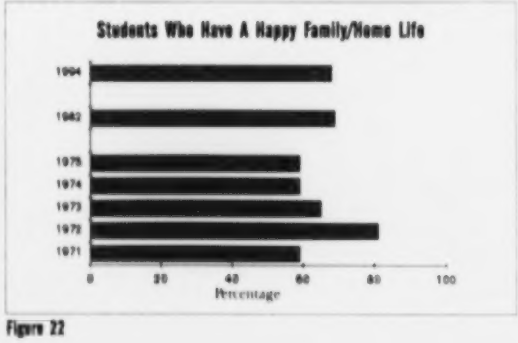


Figure 22

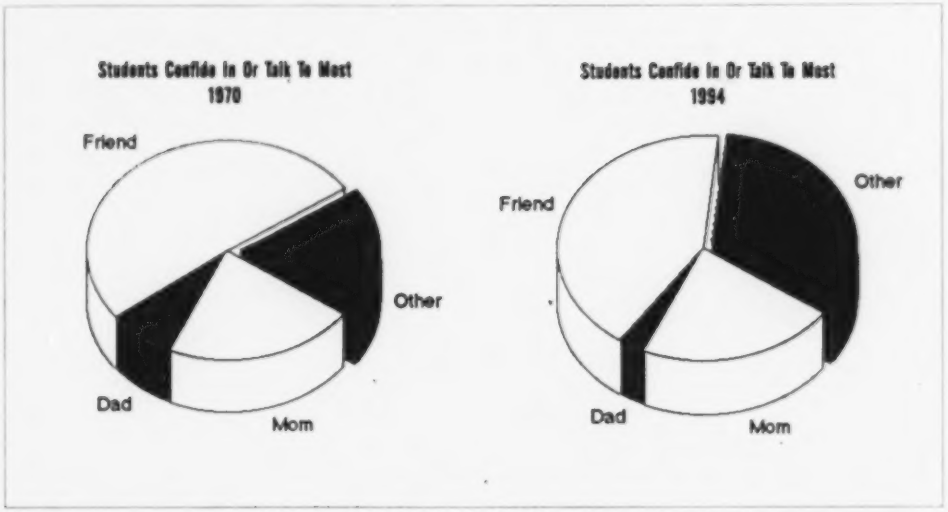


Figure 23

And while friends may still be the first place teens turn to tell their troubles, mothers have consistently gotten a large share of confidences over the years -- 22% in 1970 said they discuss problems with mom the most and 22% in 1994 said mom is the person they "talk to the most."

If imitation is the greatest flattery, then parents should be pleased indeed. The biggest bouquet today's teens throw their folks' way -- their determination to raise their own children the way they were raised themselves. At the lowest point in 1971 -- 43% -- that number was up to 62% in 1994, the second highest of the seven years it's been asked by *Who's Who*.

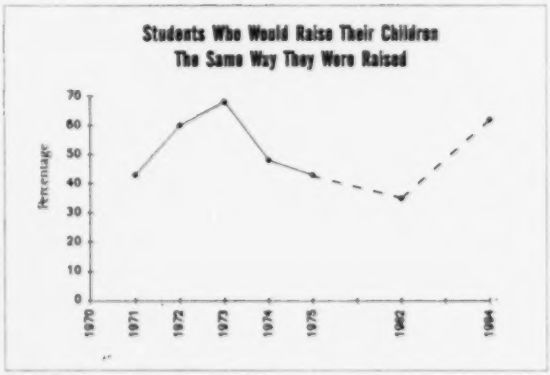


Figure 24

No matter how hard adolescents may seem to be trying to push their parents aside, parents mustn't be persuaded to turn away. Teens may never admit it to the people who raised them, but they crave both leadership and approval from their mothers and fathers. This may not always be immediately obvious to the parents of a rebellious adolescent who seems to hold them and everything their generation stands for in contempt. When so many other adults have fled the field, parents play a more crucial role than ever in helping children thrive despite the chaos that surrounds them.

CONCLUSION

Children these days don't enjoy immunity from even the cruelest realities. No restful, preparatory period in a cocoon before they are forced to confront the tough truths that grown-ups are better prepared to deal with.

Keeping the children safe is the most basic function of social institutions. Yet these young people can't feel secure once they leave their own homes. Not at school. Not on a casual evening out with a member of the opposite sex. Not with friends or acquaintances. Once they stray from their parents' orbit, teens today are taking a huge leap into a very frightening unknown.

With so much uninvited independence to cope with, teens are bound to appear a trifle self-centered in their single-minded struggles. They are also missing the hopeful sparkle that lit earlier generations from within. In their struggle toward adulthood, they are taking some very smart precautions, but they also are taking some foolish chances. Rather than make either the smart or the dumb behavior the definition of an entire generation, adults should see both as the clues they are: signals that young people stand a far better chance of becoming the responsible adults they were meant to be if they have guidance from their elders.

This is a time for shoring up the structures that used to support children while they were learning to stand on their own two feet. We need to provide places for young people to go to be in the company of adults who know how to help them grow: at school, at church, in youth organizations, and in neighborhood gathering spots. Without such a layer of adult protection to help teens interpret and manage the world's painful realities, children may only appear to be grown-up, while never actually maturing.

Parents, especially, need to be reminded that even an ultra-sophisticated, super-hip, streetwise, smart-alecky adolescent needs them as much as ever. Maybe more. As experienced as teens pretend to be, they are only pseudo-adults -- works in progress. With the help and sustenance of loving families, stubbornly bent on remaining part of their lives, even such odd creatures as these can become masterpieces-in-the-making.

Data Index

Figure 1.
Percentage of students who know someone who has brought a weapon to school,
Percentage of students who know of the presence of gangs at their school

	Weapon	Gangs
1981	28	8
1992	45	20
1993	36	17
1994	30	16

Figure 2.
Percentage of students who feel school is dangerous

1971	7
1975	7
1977	5
1978	3
1992	14
1993	12
1994	11

Figure 3.
Percentage of students who know someone who has been a victim of date rape,
Percentage of women who have been date raped,
Percentage of women who have been sexually assaulted

	Know Someone	Have Been Date Raped	Have Been Sexually Assaulted
1991	24		
1992	31	5	11
1993	25	3	20
1994	30	5	19

Figure 4.
Percentage of students who have considered/tried committing suicide,
Percentage of students who know someone who has attempted or committed suicide

	Considered	Tried	Know Someone
1972	23		
1974	17	2	
1985	28	3	40
1986	31	4	46
1987	33	3	48
1988	30	4	45
1989	30	4	60
1990	26	3	61
1991	27	4	66
1992	31	5	61
1993	32	6	72
1994	29	4	67

Figure 5.
Percentage of students who drink beer (1971-1979, 1983-1984) or alcoholic beverages (1980-82,85-94)

	Regularly/ At Least Monthly	Ever
1971	16	73
1972		74
1973	15	71
1974	15	73
1975	16	73
1976	17	52
1977	22	51
1978	16	48
1979	23	56
1980	14	51
1981	13	66
1982	14	56
1983	16	48
1984	13	73
1985	16	65
1986	17	67
1987	16	67
1988	13	64
1989	12	61
1990	12	59
1991	10	62
1992	18	47
1993	18	50
1994	19	51

Figure 6.
Percentage of students who say it is easy or not very difficult to obtain alcohol

1971	74
1973	85
1974	72
1975	74
1979	64
1992	73
1993	77
1994	81

Figure 7.
Percentage of students who have driven drunk,
Percentage of students who have ridden with a driver who had been drinking

	Driven Drunk	Rode With Driver Who Had Been Drinking
1983	7	
1991	18	
1992	13	39
1993	13	40
1994	21	25

Figure 8.
Percentage of students who have used marijuana

	Regularly/ At Least Monthly	Ever
1970		10
1971	5	25
1972	8	27
1973	8	26
1974	5	26
1975	5	25
1976	11	
1977	9	
1978	11	
1979		8
1980		6
1981	1	10
1982	0.5	16
1983	0.6	17
1984	0.5	13
1985	1.2	17
1986	2	17
1987	1.4	15
1988	1	12
1989	0.8	11
1990	0.8	9
1991	0.8	8
1992	0.9	7
1993	0.8	7
1994	2	10

Figure 9.
Percentage of students who approve of the use of marijuana,
Percentage of teens who say they would use marijuana if it were made legal

	Approve Of Use	Would Use If Made Legal
1970	22	21
1971		19
1972	35	26
1973	35	25
1974	31	19
1975		19
1979	13	11
1980		7
1982		6
1994	11	8

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Figure 10.
Percentage of students who smoke cigarettes

	Regularly/Now	Ever
1972	11	31
1974	8	19
1976	8	19
1977	6	14
1978	6	16
1980	4	10
1981	5	12
1982	3	10
1989	5	32
1990	4	30
1991	5	32
1992	4	
1994	5	32

Figure 11.
Percentage of students who have cheated

1983	70
1993	78
1994	78

Figure 12.
Percentage of students who say premarital sex is unacceptable

1970	53
1971	34
1972	34
1973	41
1974	32
1975	34
1977	34
1978	39
1979	56
1980	45
1983	44
1994	40

Figure 13.
Percentage of students who had sex before they were 16 years old;
Percentage of students who have had four or more sexual partners

	Had Sex Before 16	Have Had 4 Or More Partners
1990	44	16
1991	48	13
1992	43	14
1993	51	16
1994	53	14

Figure 14.
Percentage of students who have had sex,
Percentage of sexually active students who use contraceptives

	Have Had Sex	Use Contraceptive
1971	29	52
1972	27	63
1973	26	77
1974	29	52
1975	29	52
1976	23	61
1977	27	
1978	21	
1979	20	
1980	19	
1981	23	
1982	21	
1983	23	74
1985	22	80
1986	23	83
1987	25	84
1988	23	85
1989	24	84
1990	25	88
1991	26	91
1992	26	91
1993	25	91
1994	25	91

Figure 15.
Percentage of students who would have sex if a condom were not available

1992	41
1993	42
1994	35

Figures 16 and 17.
Percentage of students who hold a great deal of confidence in the following

	President	Congress	Supreme Court	Media	Local Police
1971	31	26	46	20	25
1975	31	26	46	20	25
1980	19	14	35	13	
1981	45	24	41	15	29
1984	45	25	22	18	20
1992	7	3		2	18
1993	5	2		1	22
1994	11	9	20	5	16

Figure 18.
Percentage of students who feel the media is biased

1971	30
1973	53
1974	48
1975	30
1976	30
1977	35
1978	30
1979	35
1991	26
1994	51

Figure 19.
Percentage of students who are in favor of censoring

	Movies	TV
1974	21	36
1994	50	50

Figure 20.
Percentage of students who say there is too much violence on TV

1977	57
1979	45
1994	59

Figure 21.
Percentage of students with divorced parents

1971	8
1974	7
1975	8
1982	12
1989	15
1990	16
1991	16
1992	15
1993	16
1994	17

Figure 22.
Percentage of students who have a happy family/home life

1971	59
1972	81
1973	65
1974	59
1975	59
1982	69
1994	68

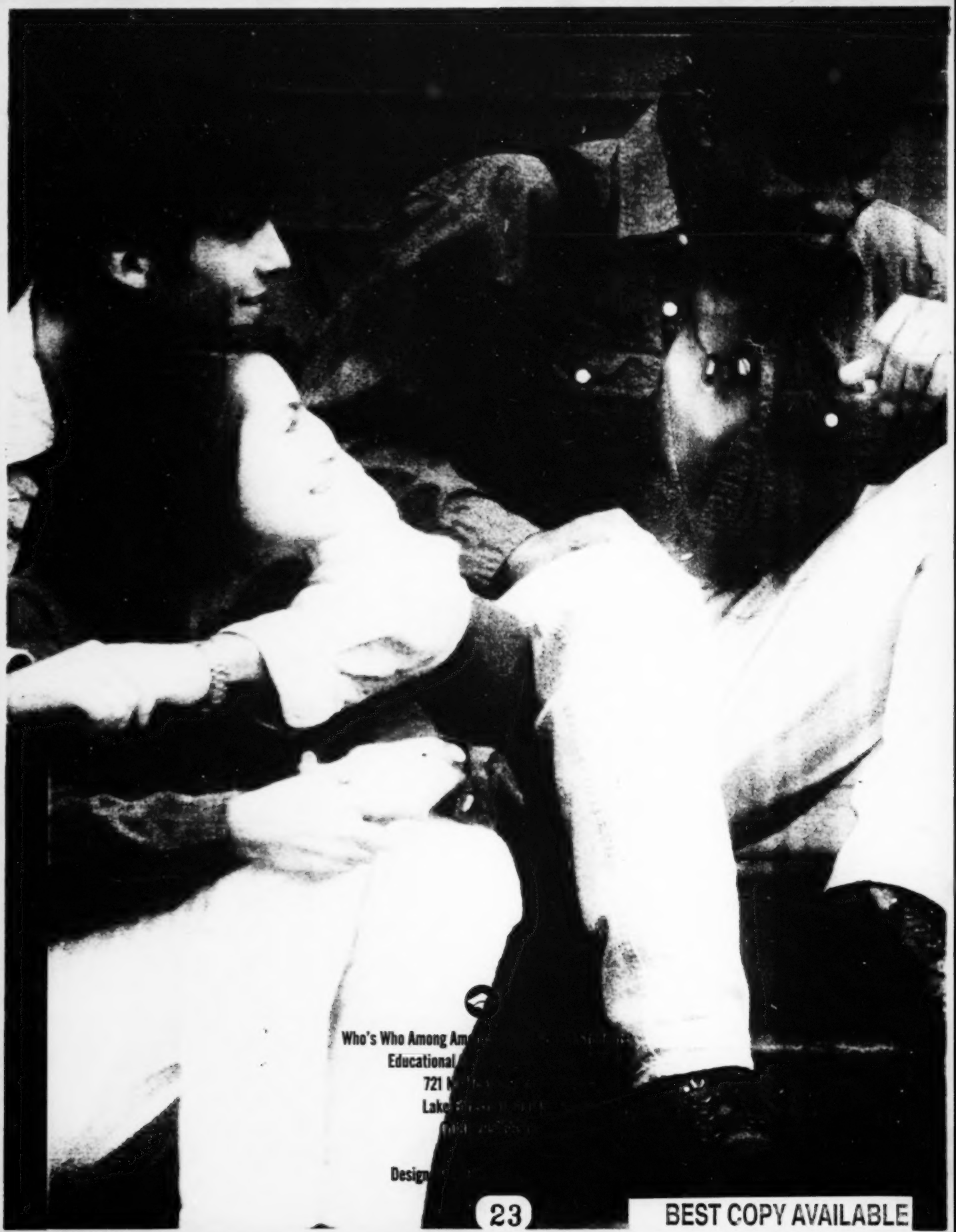
Figure 23.
Students confide in or talk to most

	Mom	Dad	Friend
1970	22	8	51
1994	22	3	42

Figure 24.
Percentage of students who would raise their children the same way they were raised

1971	43
1972	60
1973	68
1974	48
1975	43
1982	35
1994	62

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



BEST COPY AVAILABLE